

VZCZCXRO3744
RR RUEHBC RUEHKUK
DE RUEHDIR #0037/01 0461129
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 151129Z FEB 10
FM IRAN RPO DUBAI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0090
INFO IRAN COLLECTIVE
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEIDN/DNI WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUMICEA/USCENTCOM INTEL CEN MACDILL AFB FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RPO DUBAI 000037

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2020/02/15

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [SCUL](#) [IR](#)

SUBJECT: Iran Pursues Cultural Evolution, Not Revolution

CLASSIFIED BY: Alan Eyre, Director, Iran Regional Presence Office;
REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) SUMMARY: In August 2009, Supreme Leader Khamenei condemned the teaching of Western social sciences and humanities and called for a second cultural revolution. With authorities concerned by the re-opening of universities providing new opportunities to protest the presidential election, Khamenei's speech suggested the IRIG would take a long-term view toward the eliminating the toxic Western influences as the root cause of student discontent. Months later, hundreds of students have been arrested or expelled from universities and several professors fired, but Khamenei's sweeping second cultural revolution has not yet materialized. Rather, IRPO contacts have described the threatened changes at the university level as part of a broader effort to roll back academic and artistic freedom and Western influence since Ahmadinejad was elected in to his first term. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) In an August 2009 speech to several dozen university professors and Basij students, Supreme Leader Khamenei called for revision in the teaching of humanities and social sciences, suggesting that they had a corrupting influence that taught students to disdain Islam, and implicitly contribute to opposition to the regime. Throughout the fall, other government officials announced plans to segregate classrooms by sex, to increase the Basij presence in university classrooms and to place clerics in schools across country, as well as rewrite textbooks to bring them into line with the values of the Islamic Republic. Several months on, authorities have acted to contain demonstrations on university campuses and students' involvement in mass protests through an increased law enforcement presence on campus, arrests of suspected student leaders, disciplinary action against others accused of participating in protests, and using Basijis to attack and intimidate students. There have been reports of firing of some lecturers and professors sympathetic to the opposition. On January, 12 professors from Allameh Tabatabaei University were forced to retire for writing a letter to the university's president in support of a colleague and students who had been arrested. (NOTE: The Cultural Revolution took place from 1980-1987 and led to the closure of universities for three years and the purging of university faculties. END NOTE.)

13. (C) Our contacts have told us, however, that the IRIG has yet to institute the wholesale, sweeping changes intent on removing "un-Islamic influences" Khamenei and others have promised. A US-based Iranian-American professor with contacts in the humanities faculties at several Iranian universities said that professors have lowered their profile, including declining invitations to conferences in the US, but have continued to teach without problems. She speculated that the authorities have held off on more severe measures to avoid further inflaming university campuses. Another Iranian academic we met in Dubai said that there had been no sign of a coming cultural revolution at his university. Authorities had made it clear to him and his colleagues, however, that contacts with foreign universities and organizations,

particularly American ones, were to be avoided.

¶4. (C) Rather than a revolution, our contacts in academia, the arts and in the press have said Khamenei's statement should be considered as part of a broader process to tighten control over education and the arts that began with Ahmadinejad's election in ¶2005. Like the cultural revolution, however, this process has had the same goal of minimizing Western influences and, more recently, defending Iran in the perceived "soft war" with America. It has led to increased censorship, the ouster of moderate officials in various ministries, and increased scrutiny by the security services of any activity considered detrimental to the Islamic Republic.

¶5. (C) The government has given special attention to the domestic and foreign media in trying to control information and limit criticism. An Iranian journalist contact told us that in addition to increased pressure on reformist newspapers, journalism faculties at various universities are being reduced, while prospective journalism students are being required to interview with authorities to assess their ideological conformity before they are accepted. State-run news outlets are also being directed to hire graduates from IRGC-affiliated Imam Hossein and Imam Ali universities. The press section of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance (Ershad) has lost any pretense of independent decision making, and it has been totally subordinated to the security services, according to Western journalists. Ershad officials who in the past would advocate on behalf of accrediting Western journalists have been replaced, as the IRIG has restricted foreign media presence in Iran.

DUBAI 00000037 002 OF 002

¶6. (C) Other examples we have heard are as follows: Artists have told us that Ershad's cultural division is now staffed by conservatives who take a negative view of any art that is not religious. Consequently, many exhibitions have gone underground and some galleries closed. Filmmakers are required to get Ershad approval to begin shooting a film and another permit to show it, and our contacts have said that Ershad has become more rigid in its approvals, pushing filmmakers toward films that are nationalistic or mindless entertainment. These bans have forced many Iranian films to be screened at foreign film festivals because they are banned at home. Ironically, semi-official and state run news agencies are quick to hail their success when they are awarded prizes in trumpeting the artistry of Iranian film. Security officers banned actress Fatemeh Motamed Arya and documentary filmmaker Mojtaba Mirtahmasb from traveling to Hollywood as part of an Iranian delegation invited by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences because of their visible support for Mir Hossein Mousavi. State broadcaster IRIB, which has been heavily criticized for its bias during the campaigns and its slanted reporting of unrest afterward but remains the leading source of information for most Iranians, in December announced that it was going to increase the amount of religious programming and that women appearing on air would no longer be allowed to wear makeup.

¶7. (C) Authorities have also recognized, however, that they cannot eliminate all foreign cultural influences and that they need to offer some alternative. Satellite dishes continue to proliferate in Iran, with an estimated 80 percent of Iranian public having access to satellite programming, according to contacts familiar with research data. Access to most other foreign broadcasts, particularly entertainment channels, is not blocked. Facing a boycott of the annual Fajr Film Festival, Iran's largest filmfest and part of the 10 Days of Dawn celebrating the anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, authorities allowed the screening of a few Iranian films that had been banned. And IRIB, in the face of competition from foreign satellite channels like Farsi 1 and MBC Persian and boycotts of its programming, has also been trying to develop game shows and big-budget miniseries to maintain its audience. Although this may suggest easing of restrictions on arts and entertainment, observers have said that they are tactical pauses brought on by the post-election unrest not a change in direction.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: The Supreme Leader's call for a second cultural revolution follows what has been the incremental tightening of

government control on freedom of expression since Ahmadinejad took office in 2005. The postelection demonstrations and subsequent calls among demonstrators to end the Islamic Republic have given these efforts a new impetus. Although the IRIG has always limited criticism and "un-Islamic" expression, Khamenei's August speech portends a long-term effort to try again to suppress the ideas and influences -- what he has termed "cultural aggression" -- that present a threat to the regime and form the basis of the what authorities perceive as the "soft war" against Iran.

EYRE